

NEWS

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★ SECTION B

UPDATE

Emotions run high as gay rights debated

Anti-bias plan brings out hundreds

By **Dave Curtin**/Gazette Telegraph

Half of the estimated 600 people who turned out to debate the city's proposed anti-discrimination ordinance that recognizes civil rights for gays were turned away Wednesday when Centennial Hall overflowed.

The Colorado Springs measure would ban discrimination based on race, religion, age, gender, handicap and sexual orientation in areas of housing, employment and public facilities. It also would create an agency to investigate complaints.

The city's Human Relations Commission conducted the hearing and will make a recommendation to the City Council. Commission members said another hearing will be held May 21 at an undetermined location.

Those who made it into the 316-capacity auditorium argued almost exclusively about gay rights amid an explosive atmosphere of shouts and insults. Moderator Carla Hartsell, the city's director of community services, threatened several times to end the hearing prematurely.

Gays and their supporters said people deserve basic human rights and that they are being victimized by stereotypes and a fear of the unknown.

Gay rights opponents identified themselves with yellow ribbons and argued that the way people

choose to satisfy their sexual appetite does not warrant civil rights protections and that homosexual behavior is immoral and a public health risk.

Tony Marco, a gay rights opponent, said, "Simply because an individual or a group has a grievance . . . it does not necessarily follow that their grief is caused by society, or by anything other than the consequences of their own actions."

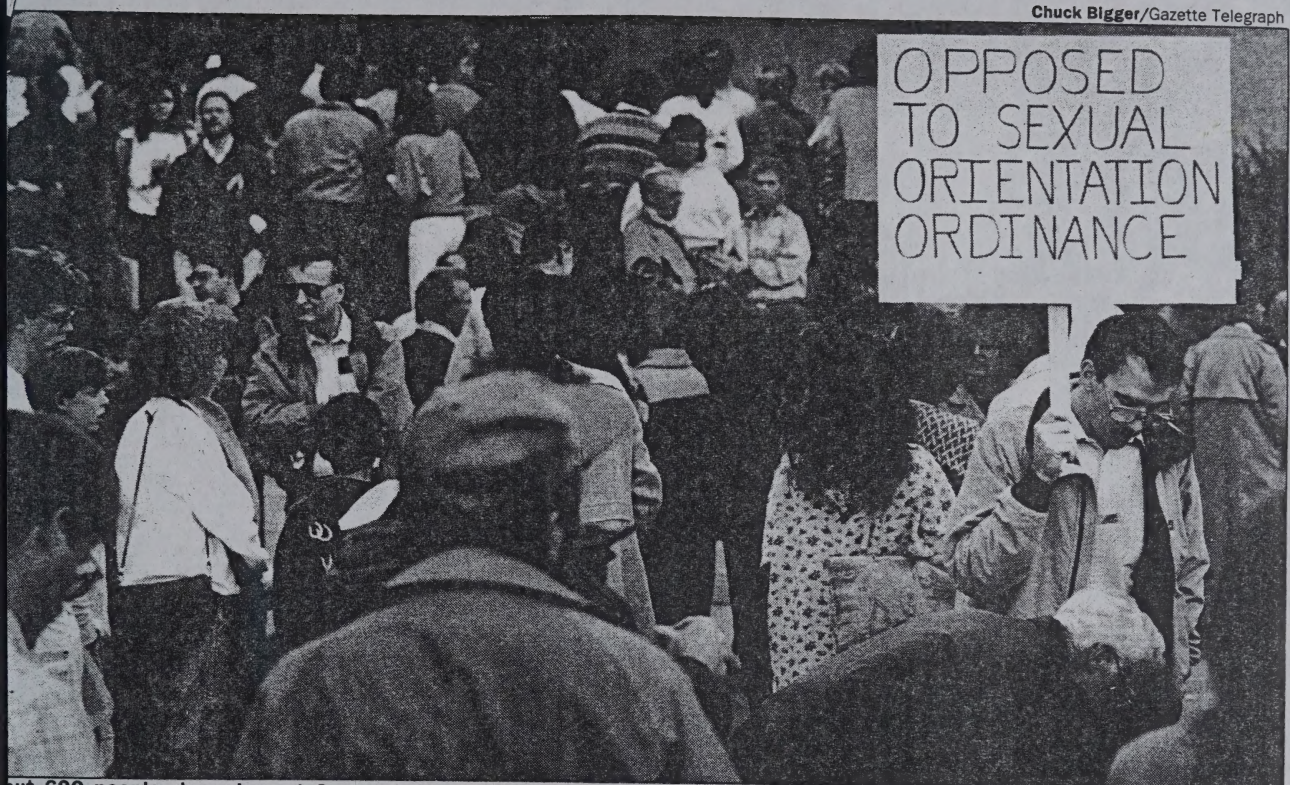
Mark Olsen said the city's gay population already receives the same civil rights as all residents, including rights to vote, police protection and to engage in their own sexual lifestyle.

"It's apparently not enough to let people do what they choose," Olsen said. "Our government has to spend its resources endorsing this lifestyle. All of our society is obligated to embrace a practice, regardless of individual beliefs. If we don't, Big Brother will correct our 'injustice.' Otherwise, we're bigots, we're homophobic."

Pat Long said the ordinance would strip her of her freedom of speech and religion.

"My Judeo-Christian value system says this is a sinful and perverted lifestyle, and I can't condone homosexuality."

See **ORDINANCE/B5**



But 600 people showed up at Centennial Hall on Wednesday for a hearing on a proposed anti-discrimination ordinance.

But the auditorium accommodated only half the crowd, so the other half stood outside the hall.

Ordinance/Panel schedules another hearing

m B1

Kevin Tebedo got the loudest applause the night when he told the commission seven of the nine City Council members oppose the ordinance.

Myself and hundreds of others in this room are not going to stand by and let you take our rights away," Tebedo said. "You don't have our rights. We're not going to give you do it."

Gay rights supporters said civil rights legislation is appropriate and offered evidence of discrimination.

James Reinhardt, former director of the University of Colorado's Human Relations Department, said, "Each day in every classroom, children are taught to give their allegiance to freedom and justice for all. Not just some. But all."

He said the ordinance proposes an "even playing field" to work and compete and contribute. It is about whether people's human rights are being violated.

Colorado College student Ian Newman said gays' rights are being violated.

"We have a policy at Colorado College which protects gays and lesbians from discrimination," said Newman, an officer of the school's Gay and Lesbian Alliance. "It does not protect us from hatred and prejudice. But it gives us recourse. When someone tried to run over me with their car yelling, 'Die fag! Die Queer!' I had recourse."

Jacquelyn Beyer, a 66-year-old retired geography professor and a lesbian, encouraged the City Council "to consider

what it might be worth to take a politically unpopular stance on something that is simply right."

"It is only a small step we ask for — but it will be a significant signal that no American citizen who is responsible and law-abiding by the codes of a diverse society deserves to be excluded."

Psychotherapist Linda Sutton said her clients come from all walks of life including heterosexual and homosexual.

"Right now in our community and the world beyond it, gays and lesbians are not free to love," Sutton said. "Their love is devalued, dismissed, degraded. If they are honest about their love, they risk rejection and harm. If they conceal their love, they risk self-hatred and depression."

